Wilson Urges Rural Health Care Get Fair Consideration During Health Care Reform Process

WASHINGTON, D.C. –Congressman Charlie Wilson (OH-6) sent a letter to House leadership outlining his support for health care reform and requesting that rural health concerns be given fair consideration in the final bill. Several other Members of Congress representing rural districts signed onto the letter. The text of the letter, which was sent today, follows.

July 16, 2009

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi   The Honorable Steny Hoyer
Speaker   Majority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives   U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol   H-107, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515   Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jim Clyburn   The Honorable John Larson
Majority Whip   Democratic Caucus Chair
H-329, The Capitol   202A CHOB
Washington, DC 20515   Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen   The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Assistant to the Speaker   Vice Chair of the House Democratic Caucus
1707 LHOB   1119 LHOB
Washington, DC 20515   Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Hoyer, Majority Whip Clyburn, Caucus Chair Larson, Assistant to the Speaker Van Hollen and Vice Chair Becerra:

We would like to   congratulate you on your work to date on America's Affordable Health Choices   Act. Though much work remains to be done, legislation of this magnitude does not come without considerable effort or dedication. We realize that we will soon   vote on arguably the most important piece of legislation to be considered during   our time in Congress. We stand with you in helping to affect change that will   positively impact Americans for years to come.

As Members of Congress   representing rural areas, we ask that you strongly consider the issues impacting   our constituents as final negotiations are made on the health care reform bill. Today, more than 62 million Americans reside in rural areas and we know all too   well the steep challenges our communities face in their attempts to access   health care.

Due to high unemployment and the prevalence of small   businesses that are unable to afford skyrocketing health care costs, residents   in rural communities are more vulnerable to being uninsured or underinsured. In   the smallest and most remote rural areas, the uninsured rate is 23% compared to   an urban rate of 19%. Often, small businesses, the engines of small towns, struggle to afford comprehensive health care options for their employees,   leading to an epidemic of uninsured and underinsured workers. Today, 69% of the   uninsured in rural America work at small companies. The confluence of these   factors leaves rural residents in greater need of health reform because they   have suffered for years from the trouble of inaccessible comprehensive private   health coverage.

In addition, those fortunate enough to have health   coverage often face physician or service shortages. Today, more than 50 million   Americans live in areas where there are too few providers to meet their basic   primary care needs. Yet these patients face the most daunting of health care   challenges; many times rural populations are older, poorer and sicker. Not only are rural communities facing a health care workforce shortage, but those doctors   that do service these communities face financial hardships from lower Medicare   reimbursement rates.

As representatives of rural America, we strongly   believe that our areas deserve a better partner in the federal government when   it comes to health care. This can be achieved through greater accessibility for   a vulnerable population; through fair reimbursement practices for our valued   physicians; appropriate incentives, including debt relief and increased   payments, for workforce retention and recruitment; and through appropriate   consideration of small business owners who struggle to afford adequate coverage.

We very much look forward to working with you on these important issues   that are so critical to our constituencies. Again, we applaud your leadership to   date, and look forward to being a constructive part of the final health care   reform package.